

TAINES "MODERN REGIME."

A GREAT STUDY OF NAPOLEON.

LES ORIGINES DE LA FRANCE CONTEMPORAINE.
Par M. Taine. L'Édition Française. Le Recueil
Modèle. Tome I., pp. 44-. Paris: Hachette
et Cie. New York: F. W. Christien.

The fifth volume of M. Taine's great work opens with a remarkable study of Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a careful, thorough analysis of his character, and presents him more impartially and comprehensively than any previous writer has done. M. Taine is not the originator of the parallel he here draws between Napoleon and the Italian despots of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; but he carries the comparison much further than did those who first suggested it, and he heightens the effectiveness of the analogy. If there is a fault in this part of the analysis, it consists in attaching too much significance to the resemblance, real or fancied, between Bonaparte and the contemporaries of Dante and of Michael Angelo. For—and no one has shown this so clearly as M. Taine himself—the greatest fact in Napoleon's case was his unlikeness to any man of whom we possess a competent knowledge. As Madame de Staél said in the penetrating and fine estimate here cited, Napoleon seemed either more or less than a man, but not as the peer and fellow of human beings. What was most akin in him to the Italian despots of the Renaissance M. Taine points out with his characteristic lucidity, saying: "If we examine the contemporaries of Dante and Michael Angelo closely, we observe that they differ from ourselves more in character than in spirit. Three hundred years of police, of courts and gendarmeries, of social discipline, of pacific manners and inherited civilization, have deadened in us the strength and impetuosity of our native passions; these were intact in Italy at the time of the Renaissance; the emotions of man were then stronger and deeper than at present, his desires more vehement and unruly, his vocation more energetic and tempestuous than ours; whatever was the motive force of the individual, pride, ambition, jealousy, hate, love, envy or sensuality, this interior spring coiled itself and discharged itself with a vigor and a violence which have disappeared. They recur in this great survivor of the fifteenth century; the play of the nervous engine is alike with him and his Italian ancestors; never was there, not even among the Borgias and Malatestas, a more sensitive and impulsive brain, a brain capable of such electric charges, or one in which the internal storm was more sustained and resounding, more sudden in lightning-flashes, or more irresistible in its explosions."

This vigorous, primitive nature found in the soul of France, prepared by the storms of the Revolution, a medium more favorable than the old field of the Middle Ages. Napoleon was alone here; he had not, like his Italian ancestors, to encounter the rivalry of his own species; nothing repressed him; he could absorb all the juices of the earth, all the air and the sunlight in space, and develop into the colossal form which was denied to his predecessors, who, while perhaps equally virile and certainly equally absorbent, were born in a less nourishing region and checked in their growth by mutual competition." The surface effectiveness of this parallel is obvious, but it is questionable whether a closer examination would justify the extent to which M. Taine carried it. To say that Napoleon ranks with Dante and Michael Angelo as the three great Italians of the Renaissance has the apparent felicity of a brilliant observation; but none the less Napoleon stands by himself, and all attempts to liken him to others fail signally, as this volume demonstrates most conclusively. Thus M. Taine remarks that a dominant note in the character of the Italian despots and petty princes was the force and lucidity of their intellectual equipment. But there is no evidence so much as to suggest an intellectual parallel between any one of them and Napoleon, for the manner in which his intellect "functioned" was so unique that one is almost warranted in terming it superhuman. Let M. Taine furnish all the evidence of this, and his magazine of facts is certainly a full one. He tells how Napoleon carried in his head three mighty portfolios or atlases, in which the military, financial and executive details of his Empire were ranged methodically; how every detail in every department of government was at its owner's command constantly; how he perpetually overruled his subordinates by exhibiting a fuller knowledge of their work than they possessed themselves; how from hour to hour he knew where every battalion, regiment and company, every gun and every horse in the army were stationed; how he could always bring his vast knowledge to bear on the affair of the moment, and how the most sudden exigency always found him prepared with a plan.

This marvelous memory was co-ordinated with an energy that could not be weighed. He wore out all his levetants, all the statesmen, secretaries, men of affairs, who had to do with him. He worked eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, and without showing the least fatigue. He would keep his Council in session sometimes from 10 at night until 5 the next morning, and when all the rest were drooping with sleep he would be as fresh as ever, and as ready for discussion. He knew the affairs of sixty millions of people, and not only public, but, to a large extent, private affairs. No ruler the world has ever known displayed so amazing a fecundity of resources, so inexhaustible a power of assimilation, so superhuman an energy, or so imposing a personal influence. M. Taine expatiates upon this last characteristic, and it is indeed of the highest significance, for it tends to explain to generations who knew not the man the extraordinary effect his mere presence had upon all who came in contact with him. M. Taine is doubtless right in looking to his Corsican birth and early training for the bent which Napoleon's mind took. Reared amid a semi-savage people, given over to vendettas, feuds, perpetual warfare; a people at once haughty, proud, fierce, treacherous and cruel, who retained and believed in all the stratagems and crafty manoeuvres of the Middle Ages; who held that meanness, deceit, perfidy, duplicity, were justifiable in dealing with an enemy, and who systematically defied all law which interfered with their hereditary anarchy—it was inevitable that Napoleon should acquire peculiar views and tendencies, and it is perfectly clear that these views and tendencies were directly in the line of the Renaissance analogy which M. Taine seeks to establish.

But entirely distinct and apart from all this is the fact that from the opening of his career Napoleon inspired fear in all who approached him. What this fear was Madame de Staél has told us, and it would not be possible to improve on her vivid description or her piercing analysis of the strange character before which she felt herself humbled and subjected. She saw him first on his return to France after the Treaty of Campo-Formio. To a feeling of admiration, she soon quickly succeeded a very marked sentiment of fear. "Yet," she proceeds, "he had at this time no power, and it was even thought that he was threatened by the dark suspicions of the Directory." There was in his position, therefore, no reason for such a feeling as she experienced. The fear she felt "was only caused by the singular effect of his personality upon nearly all who approached him." Then she dissects this effect subtly: "I have seen men worthy of all respect. I have also seen brutal men; but there was something in the impression made upon me by Bonaparte which recalled neither of these. I very soon perceived that his character could not be defined by the conventional terms in common use; he was neither good nor bad, nor gentle nor cruel, in the ordinary meaning of the words. Such a being, having no peer, could neither experience resentment nor sympathy; he was either more or less than a man; his attitude, his spirit, his language, are evidences of an alien nature.... Instead of becoming reassured by seeing Bonaparte often, I grew more apprehensive the more I saw of him. I felt in a confused way that no emotion of the

heart could touch him. He looks upon a human creature as a fact or thing, and not as his own like. He neither hates nor loves, for him nothing exists but himself, all the rest of the world are mere cipher."

Madame de Staél was a woman, and it might be said that she was, therefore, peculiarly sensitive; but men, and strong men, and rough, hard men, experienced the same mysterious domination, the same inexplicable physical terror in Napoleon's presence. When General Augereau went to see the young Bonaparte, intending to bully and overawe him, he found all his purposes melting away in the presence of his proposed victim. He remained mute, took Napoleon's orders, and retiring, humbly declared to Massena that the devil of a General had frightened him. Another rough soldier, noted for his severity and brutality, went through the same experience. Vandamme, speaking of the Emperor, said: "This devil of a man exercises a fascination upon me that I can't understand. Though I fear neither God nor Devil, when I approach him I am ready to tremble like a child; and I would go through fire and water for him." Abundance of equally impressive testimony to the remarkable influence of his personality might be adduced. The whole history of the Imperial Court is pervaded by it. Never was there a sovereign so feared by his courtiers. Nor was it only in his presence that the peculiar fear inspired by him operated. His officials felt his influence when he was far away, and several have left on record the vivid impressions made by the feeling of his omnipresent supervising spirit. The extraordinary scope of his knowledge in all that concerned the Government, military and civil, added greatly to the effect produced by his personality. When he visited some distant rural town and interrogated the municipal authorities, he always showed a familiarity with their affairs which amazed them. At such times, too, he would promptly, and with unfailing judgment, determine vexed local questions. A morning's ride in the neighborhood, a glance over the surrounding country, sufficed him to settle offhand the location of roads, aqueducts, bridges, etc. He was never at a loss, and he invariably showed a comprehension of all the factors in whatever problem was presented to him for solution.

The master-influence in his life was a colossal egotism. That must be admitted; and it is no less clear that this egotism by its natural development brought about his ruin. But the work he did demanded an extraordinary, even an imperial, mental and physical constitution, and without these it could not have been accomplished. If, therefore, the masterly analysis of M. Taine discloses the sinister traits in Napoleon's character and makes it plainer than ever that he was a curse to France and to the world, it nevertheless strengthens the proofs of his immeasurable superiority to his contemporaries in all that pertains to command, organization and administration, and dissipates forever those narrow and prejudiced views which have rated him as a mere clever and unscrupulous adventurer. An adventurer he was, and both clever and unscrupulous; but none of the three terms describes or defines him and in ascertaining which misrepresent a character unique in human history. It was the characteristic of Napoleon that he regarded himself as above and outside of all conventions. He not only felt but said frankly that moral laws were not made for him; and when in his judgment the occasion demanded or his will required, he calmly ignored or denied those laws. He was not immoral, but unshamed. As Madame de Staél put it, "for him nothing existed but himself."

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In this volume M. Taine has undertaken to trace the development and effects of the Napoleonic views. These results upon the external relations of France have long been familiar to all the world. They wrought the collapse of the First Empire and the nullification of the country, besides the loss of 15,000,000 Frenchmen and some 2,000,000 foreigners, thrown away in the war of the period. But their effects in the internal condition of France have not before been explained with the thoroughness and the trenchant criticism here devoted to the work. M. Taine, after his study of Napoleon, proceeds to inquire into the formation and characteristics of the new State, the objects and merits of the system, and the views and effects of the system. This is as far as the present volume goes; the analysis will be completed and the whole work brought to a conclusion in a second volume. The task of M. Taine necessitates constant references to and comparison with the old regime and the Revolutionary status. These parts of the book are full of instructive analogies and contrasts. The increasing feebleness of the monarchy, supplied by the practice of delegating royal authority by sale or gift, so diffused and decentralized power that when the strain came in 1789, the whole machine gave way. The Revolution started with a passion for destruction, developed into murderous tyranny and issued in anarchy. The law fell into contempt and disuse. The revenue was uncollected. There was no protection for life or property. All the safeguards of civilization were torn away. Religion, education, order, were no more. Then came Napoleon and drew system out of the chaos. His iron will, his intense practicality, his supernatural prescience, overcame every difficulty and cleared away every sign of disaffection. Briguadage ceased. The citizen once more felt the shelter of the law. The Church rose from her ruins. The schoolhouse was rebuilt. The revenue was collected. Law and order once more reigned. The people were content, for they had grown to hate the Revolution, and they welcomed a power which put it down and gave them peace and opportunity to labor with a purpose.

Napoleon did not take away popular liberty, for it did not exist under the Revolution. That was the rule of the worst elements in the nation, and it had produced demoralization everywhere. His iron will, his intense practicality, his supernatural prescience, overcame every difficulty and cleared away every sign of disaffection. Briguadage ceased. The citizen once more felt the shelter of the law. The Church rose from her ruins. The schoolhouse was rebuilt. The revenue was collected. Law and order once more reigned. The people were content, for they had grown to hate the Revolution, and they welcomed a power which put it down and gave them peace and opportunity to labor with a purpose.

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but also influences and insinuates various women, with whom he falls in love from age to age, or who fall in love with him. We shall not spoil the story by sketching it. It must be enough to know that "Phara the Phenician" figures as a foster brother of the ancient Britons, as a captain during the Roman period as a Saxon Thane at the time of the Norman Conquest the nights of Senlac for Harold, as a knight at arms with Edward the Third, and as a wanderer at the reign of Elizabeth, when his career is brought to an end. The whole complicated story is wrought out with much skill and with decided descriptive and imaginative power. For a young man's first novel—phar the Phenician—has few merits, but needs no allowance on account of the author's youth and inexperience. It is a bright, clever and strong piece of work, and Sir Edwin does well to be proud of it.

The ten stories translated by Walter Learned give a good representation of Copper's best qualities as a writer. They are all characterized by that perfection of form for which we have become accustomed to look in French short stories alone. The French "conte" is a form of fiction which has been carried to the highest point of artistic treatment. Whether as regards the choice of motives, the dominant tone, the incidental effects, the development, or the denouement, there is in the best examples of these little tales nothing further to seek or to desire. Copper's Copper gives a good representation of Copper's best qualities as a writer. They are all characterized by that perfection of form for which we have become accustomed to look in French short stories alone. The French "conte" is a form of fiction which has been carried to the highest point of artistic treatment. 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